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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

memorandum

DATE: October 3, 1983

REPLY TO: *aa*
ATTN: *aa*

Tony Allitto, Political Section, American Embassy, Buenos Aires *R*

SUBJECT: Summary of the Visit of James Thyden, Human Rights Office
Director, Department of State (September 28 - October 2)

TO: (SEE DISTRIBUTION)

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
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The following items of interest came up during the conversations that Mr. Thyden had during his orientation visit to Argentina.

Mrs. Hebe de Bonafini
President of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

In the Mothers' headquarters on September 29, Mrs. Bonafini made these points:

-- The Mothers have had no help from the U.S. in their struggle to find out what happened to their children who disappeared.

-- It pains the Mothers to see how silent the Reagan Administration has been on the subject of human rights in general, and missing persons in Argentina in particular. She cited the U.S. silence on the promulgation of the amnesty law on September 23 as an example, and called on the U.S. to denounce it.

-- Maintaining good relations with the Argentine military has apparently been more important to the Reagan Administration than promoting human rights. The Reagan Administration should think about the Argentine people, too.

-- The Mothers are happy to see elections coming up and a change from a military to a civilian government, but they will continue to press their demands, no matter what kind of government there is, for: a return of the missing who are still alive, an accounting for those who are dead, and punishment of all those responsible for the disappearances and the deaths. She mentioned the disappearance last month of Ruben Alvarez (Intransigent Party candidate for the Salta Province Senate) as proof that disappearances have not ceased in Argentina.

Mr. Thyden explained the Reagan Administration's human rights policy, especially its belief that quiet diplomacy is often more effective with governments such as Argentina's than public speeches. He also explained that even though the Reagan Administration may not always be able to do all that the Mothers would like, it wants the Mothers to know that their concerns are considered by policymakers in Washington.

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Minister Fernando Petrella
Director of the North American Department
Ministry of Foreign Relations

Jose Mina
First Secretary
Country Officer for the U.S.
Ministry of Foreign Relations

In the Rio Alba restaurant on September 29 Petrella and Mina agreed on the following points:

-- Most Argentines do not want investigations into the conduct of the war against subversion. With all the problems that the new civilian government will face, it should look to the future and not to the past.

-- The human rights groups overestimate their strength and their support within Argentina.

-- The U.S. can do the most good for Argentina by getting the Pentagon to review and revise the training courses that are given for military officers from Latin America, and when future training is given to Argentine officers again, seeing to it that they return to Argentina imbued with a mission of defending the country's borders against foreign enemies instead of looking under the rug for alleged communists and terrorists.

When asked about the disappearance of Ruben Alvarez, Mina could offer no explanation why anyone would want to kidnap Alvarez.

Dr. Emilio Mignone
President of the Center for Legal and
Social Studies (CELS)

Dr. Augusto Conte
Vice President of CELS

In CELS headquarters on September 29 Mignone and Conte agreed on the following points:

- The U.S. Embassy overestimates the political power of the Argentine military.
- CELS will continue to seek trials of all those responsible for disappearances and murders, whether the military likes it or not.
- They believe that the military will not be able to stop the Judicial Branch from functioning under a civilian government, and pointed to the judges in this military government who have already declared the amnesty law null.
- They also believe, however, that it will be difficult to prove many of the cases against the military in court, because of lack of evidence, much of which, they assume, the military have already destroyed or are in the process of destroying now.
- The climate of fear in Argentina persists, but is less now than at any time in recent years and continues to decrease. As a result, more people are stepping forward to tell their stories about disappearances, secret concentration camps, etc.
- Disappearances have not ceased, as seen this year by the cases of Osvaldo Cambiaso, Pereira Rossi, and Ruben Alvarez.
- The U.S. policy of the past year (of quiet diplomacy) has been a big mistake, and the people of Argentina resent it.

Conte also pointed out how important the external debt issue is, because of its considerable ramifications. He said that the U.S. Government could really help Argentina by convincing U.S. banks to be reasonable and to renegotiate the terms of repayment so that Argentina would be able to repay its debts and get the country's economy going again.

Mr. Thyden explained that the Reagan Administration believed that quiet diplomacy is not as ineffective as Mignone and Conte implied, and that the Reagan Administration supports the return to democracy in Argentina (and other countries) as the best protection of human rights in the future.

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improved human rights situation here. He seemed exasperated, but in a sense resigned, to the commotion caused by the Alvarez disappearance in Salta two weeks before. He said his Ministry was making every reasonable effort to locate the man, so far without success. Alvarez had a long history of politically subversive activity as a member of ERP (the Revolutionary Army of the People), according to Lazzano, having been imprisoned in the late sixties (amnestied in 1973) and again after the 1976 coup (he was again released in 1980). Dr. Lazzano also said Alvarez has a history of mental disturbance ("amnesia").

(Coincidentally as we were leaving the Casa Rosada, a march of a couple thousand was moving on the palace to demonstrate for the reappearance alive of Alvarez. Made up of mostly younger people, the Mothers were represented along with contingents from most of the parties and the universities.)

Seventeen University of Belgrano professors and graduate students on September 30 at the University:

After Mr. Thyden explained the Reagan Administration's human rights policy, the following points were made by members of the audience either as statements or in questions:

- "Although I agree with the general principles of human rights that you outlined, I have a problem with a state trying to apply those general principles in foreign policy. The application results in inconsistencies and mistakes.
- "U.S. human rights policies, as they have been applied, have been seen by many Argentines to be arbitrary, interventionist, opportunistic, and ineffective. Moreover, they have not helped to improve Argentine-American relations despite good intentions.
- "Patt Derian came here, arrogantly and harshly presented to the GOA a list of 7,000 people who had allegedly disappeared in Argentina, and demanded to know what had happened to those people. Then a Democratic Congressman whom I do not wish to name, a member of Miss Derian's delegation, asked for a private meeting with the Undersecretary for Foreign Relations and said that of the 7,000 the delegation was really interested in ten - and that Jacobo Timerman was number one. That kind of opportunistic policy is typical of U.S. policy vis-a-vis Argentina and, I believe, all of Latin America.

[REDACTED]

-- "I have no objection to the U.S. interest in Timerman, but I believe that the U.S. should have pushed just as hard for the other 6,999 on Miss Derian's list.

-- "The U.S. never understood that Timerman had problems with the GOA not because he was Jewish but because he allegedly had links to terrorists. The Jewish influence in the foreign policy of the U.S. sometimes results in such mistakes."

American Rabbi Marshall Meyer (who has been living in Argentina for 24 years) in his home on September 30:

-- There has been an increase in anti-Semitism in 1983, expressed by graffiti, swastikas, threatening calls, and literature.

-- He believes the increase is the result of a planned, coordinated campaign by the intelligence services of the armed forces, who want to leave Argentina a mess for the incoming civilian government so that the military will be called on to return to power in the future.

-- He believes that the anti-Semitism will continue to increase.

-- He thinks that most Argentines would prefer not to have the war against subversion investigated.

Dr. Sion Cohen-Imach
President of the Delegation of Israeli-Argentine
Associations (DAIA)

In his office on September 30:

-- There has been an increase in anti-Semitism in 1983, but no bombings, no violence directed against individuals, and no one has been killed or harmed.

-- He does not believe that any of the anti-Semitism is GOA inspired. When asked about the armed forces' intelligence services, he said that his organization had no indications that those services were behind such activity. He believes the anti-Semitism is the work of extreme right-wing, ultra-nationalistic groups (which he did not name).

-- He thinks that some anti-Semitism will continue under a civilian government, but did not wish to predict an

increase or a decrease.

-- Concerning the alleged ex-Nazi Walter Kutschmann (alias Pedro Ricardo Olmo) who was discovered to be living in Argentina earlier this year, the DAIA's sources indicate that he has probably left Argentina, possibly with the help of unknown persons.

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